

the positiveness, which has accomplished so much, should have been unwilling to decide everything. This is hardly the style for history. The data of historical narratives, especially of modern histories, are a heap of confusion. No one can tell where they lie, or where they do not lie; what is in them, or what is not in them. . . . History is a vestige of vestiges ; few facts leave any trace of themselves, any witness of their occurrence; of fewer still is that witness preserved . . . It is not possible that these data can be very fertile in certainties. Few people would make anything of them : a memoir here, a MS. there—two letters in a magazine—an assertion by a person whose veracity is denied,—these are the sort of evidence out of which a flowing narrative is to be educed ; and of course it ought not to be too flowing. ' If you please, sir, tell me what you do *not* know/ was the inquiry of a humble pupil addressed to a great man of science. It would have been a relief to the readers of Macaulay if he had shown a little the outside of uncertainties, which there must be—the gradations of doubt, which there ought to be—the singular accumulation of difficulties, which must beset the extraction of a very easy narrative from the very confused materials.<sup>1</sup>

If Macaulay had expressed these doubts and shown these uncertainties, his book would not have been such a success with the general reader. The public likes to be

told that the volume it is taking the trouble to  
read is all  
true, does not want to have the labour of  
distinguishing  
between hypotheses and facts, and is not in  
the least inter-  
ested in the process by which the historian  
arrives at the  
truth. It demands a picture or a story. For  
students of  
history, however, the question how Macaulay  
got at his  
facts, and what right he had to be so certain  
about them,  
should be as interesting as the picture or the  
story. There-

<sup>1</sup> Walter Bagehot, *Literary Studies* (2 vols. ; 1879),  
ii. 256.